Rodoretto, (Torino) Italy

895

Achille Deodato

The Waldensian Church

A High Call

and a Resolute Effort to Answer

MISSIONARY RESEARCH
LIBRARY
NEW YORK CITY

MAY 2 0 1954

The Waldensian Church

The Great Discovery

It occurred in a village of the Abruzzo mountains. Great excitement had arisen from the preaching of the local priest who, after the celebration of the mass, one Sunday morning, had frightened the population by announcing excommunication to all those who felt inclined to attend the meeting arranged by a protestant evangelist that very same night.

The evangelist was new to the place. Coming from a nearby village, he had for some weeks been visiting in the village, seeking an opportunity to announce the Gospel.

The approach to some owners of property had been unsuccessful. They did not want any change in the social situation of the village and had looked at him with suspicion.

He had turned then to the poor country folk who, exploited by the landlords, lived in extreme material poverty and spiritual distress.

One of them had put his home at the disposal of the evangelist for a religious meeting, thence the frightening sermon of the local priest.

In spite of the threat, some people, led by curiosity, went to hear the message of the stranger.

The evangelist gave with simplicity the bread of life to that hungry group. He had the clear feeling that the words of the Lord were new to them. They were listening intensely. He noted among others a poor woman whose face responded to his message with an expression of wonder and joy in contrast to the tears pouring from her eyes.

She was a widow, left with two invalided sons, one of whom was paralysed. Her life had been a continuous fight against misery and distress. One day, 19 years before that meeting, a stranger passing through the village had given her a Bible, advising her not to tell the priest. "You will find in it the solution to your problems," had said the stranger. Thus for 19 years she had read the Bible secretly, although attending mass regularly.

She could not understand exactly what it was about, and yet she had the feeling that she must persevere until full light could be given to her spirit.

When she heard the priest that morning summoning the congregation to abstain from giving a hearing to the evangelist, she decided that she must not heed the priest but learn for herself.

And now, there she was, amazed to realise that the words uttered by the evangelist were the same she had read so many times in the mysterious book, but their meaning now was clear to her mind and their consolation came down to her heart.

The woman who had made the great discovery is now the inspiration of the new Waldensian Congregation of San Salvo, in the Abruzzo Mountains, established three years ago. Her burdens are the same as formerly, but she bears them with courage, and eases those of her neighbors.

Experiences of that kind are not rare in our evangelistic work in Italy. New groups are formed, new congregations come to life composed of people who have abandoned the traditional form of religion because of the distressing contrast between the religious teaching they have received and the conditions of life in which they are kept. Some say they had become atheists, though still they were seeking God. All they had needed was the light of the Gospel, the release of the conscience and mind from the pressure of fear exerted upon them by a fanatical clergy, inclined to political intrigue, and allied with those who have always exploited them.

There is the belief in the United States that Roman Catholicism is the strongest bulwark against Communism. I cannot say that this is true in Italy, for the lack of freedom of conscience, the clerical pressure exerted in all dominions of life, the political activity of the Church, its extended control from the schools to the press, its intrusion in every sector of civil life, the impudent backing of the interests of those who have an advantage in leaving things as they are, the spirit of intolerance, the claim that all other creeds are in error and have no right to exist, pro-

The Waldensian Evangelist of the Abruzzo region (extreme right) with the Moderator and members of a congregation.

duce a spirit of revolt which gives to Communistic propaganda the best opportunity.

The results of the last political elections of June 1953 clearly indicate that large spheres of the Italian population have reacted against the clerical influence which has prevented our country from becoming a truly democratic nation.

The Missing Experience

Everyone who travels through the villages of the southern part of Italy and Sicily and takes an interest not only in the beauty of the country but also in the people, cannot but be surprised in finding himself submerged in the atmosphere of the middle ages.

There are extended regions of our country in which life has flowed for centuries in the same old way, the villages pillaged through many invasion have been rebuilt in the same places, in the same manner, the land is tilled with the same system of the ancestors. The habits of the people have not changed and the garments are still of the same kind as of old.

It may be a thrilling experience for the visitor, but when one realizes the social, moral and spiritual conditions in which these people live, the ignorance in which they have remained because they are cut off from all stream of thought, the transposition of pagan rites into a Christian structure, one wonders if these people were ever touched by Christianity at all.

The poverty of the land, the economic structure, the lack of industries and of enterprise, the determination of the landlords to refuse any project aiming at an improvement of the social conditions has much to do with the situation, but one cannot help thinking that the main reason for such static and miserable conditions of life has to be found in the missing of an experience, the experience of the religious Reformation through which other countries in Europe stepped out resolutely from the Middle Ages.

The use of an open Bible, the freedom of conscience, the desire and possibility of personal investigation, the new concepts of human dignity, of work, of personal responsibility, were all fruits of the Reformation which changed so rapidly the structure of so many countries.

It seems impossible to explain and hard to believe that Italy which has the longest Christian tradition in Europe, the land to which St. Paul brought the Christian message, should have remained untouched by the spiritual revolution of the Reformation.

In reality the first signs of the religious Reformation appeared in Italy earlier than in any other country, but they have been suffocated through centuries of bloody persecutions.

The Forerunners of the Reformation

Early in the Middle Ages there were in the western Alps and other districts in the north of Italy certain groups which opposed the superstitions and abuses of the dominant Church and remained faithful to the pure faith founded on the Bible. Among them were the disciples of Claudius, the Archbishop of Turin, who protested against the worship of saints and the adoration of images.

It is not unlikely that the Waldensians may have pooled those former religious streams in their own movement.

However, of the many groups of "heretical" movements of the time they were the only ones whose lot it was to survive.

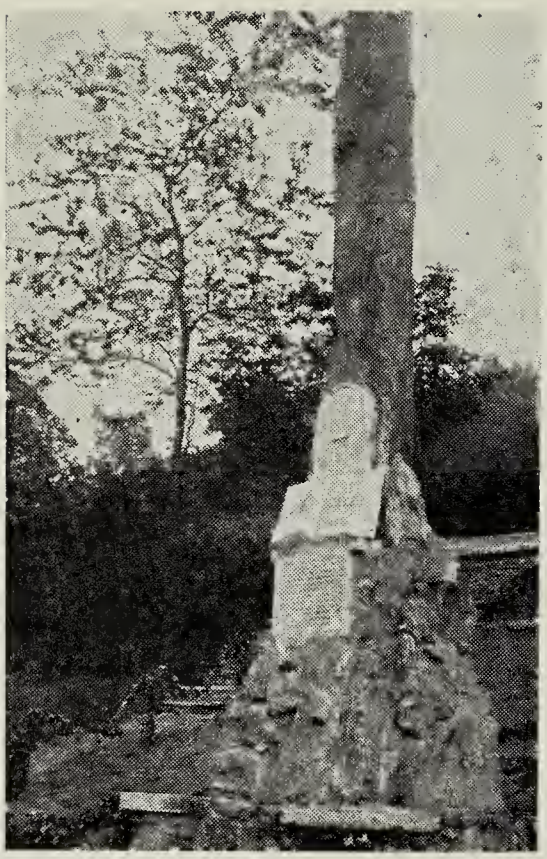
Did they derive their name from Peter Valdus? We do not know for sure. It is certain, however, that Peter Valdus was the prominent figure of the time and that the movement spread tremendously under his leadership.

Having read the New Testament at a time of great sorrow and spiritual distress and having found in it rest for his soul, he wanted to share his experiences of a new life in simplicity and charity. An increasing number of friends joined him. Their aim was to make the Gospel known in the vernacular so that the common people could understand it and practice it.

The priests did not like those preachers who had given all they had to the poor. The Archbishop of Lyons forbade their activity saying that preaching and explaining the Bible was the exclusive department of the priests.

Valdus appealed to the Pope but he was refused the authorization to preach and was enjoined to submit to the orders of the Archbishop. He left Rome defying the Pope with the words of the Apostles (Acts IV:19) "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye."

Chased from Lyons, Valdus and his followers went into other countries, "Provence, Dauphine, Northern Italy, Germany, Bohemia."



Chanforan Monument to the Synod of 1532 when the Waldensian Movement joined the Reformation.

In the 13th century they had spread so much in the south of France that Church opposition became implacable. Crusades after crusades were preached by the Popes against them and persecutions followed one another in the most cruel way.

Those who escaped the sword went to prison or died at the stake, unless they managed to find refuge in the ravines and valleys of the Cottian Alps.

And yet what was the crime for which they were so bitterly pursued? We learn that they had formed communities led by elders called "Barba" (uncle). These elders had little scholastic learning but knew by heart most of the books of the New Testament and travelled from place to place, undertaking long journeys to preach the Gospel. The members of the communities lived a strictly disciplined, austere life and when they had differences they did not take them to tribunal but submitted to the judgment of the elders.

A very important moment of Waldensian history was when deputies crossed the Alps to confer with the leaders of the then well established Reformation in Switzerland. On their return a Synod was held in the Valley of Angrogna in the year 1532. Some delegates came even from the mountains of Calabria (southern Italy) where from ancient times some very prosperous communities had been established. From Switzerland two reformers arrived: Farel and Olivetan. At the Synod the principal articles of the Waldensian Confession of Faith were discussed and two important decisions were taken:

(a) Worship was no longer to take place in secret, but the Waldensians should build Churches for regular religious services. Thus the first Churches were built in 1555. Each parish was to have its own pastor.

(b) A considerable amount of money was gathered to prepare a new translation of the Bible in the French language. The charge of the translation from the original Hebrew and Greek was assigned to Olivetan, cousin of John Calvin.

There followed a time of progress and expansion of the Waldensian Church, but it did not last very long. In 1555 when the first churches were built in Torre Pellice, and in the Anggrogna Valley, the Duke Emanuel Philibert of Savoy, urged by the Pope and by the general of the Jesuits, promulgated an edict forbidding the Waldensians to attend preaching other than Roman Catholic.

An army was sent to the Valleys to enforce the edict, towns and villages were seized, prisoners treated with inhuman cruelty. Many girls, to escape the brutal violence of the soldiers threw themselves over precipices and the men in despair took up arms and withdrew to the natural fortresses of their mountains where they were able to resist the enemy.

The Duke was compelled to acknowledge that it was impossible to conquer these gallant people and a peace treaty was signed in 1561 at Cavour, not far from Torre Pellice.

The Waldensians were granted a certain amount of liberty,

The Ancient Church of Ciabas built in 1555.

they were permitted to assemble in their usual places, to preach and worship. This treaty, often broken afterwards, remained up to the 19th century the legal basis of the Waldensian Church.

But new misfortunes for the Waldensians were at hand.

The *"Congregation for the propagation of faith and the extermination of Heresy"* took steps to start a new persecution with the consent of the feeble Duke of Savoy.

It was the year 1655; an army of sixteen thousand men entered the Waldensian Valleys, promising solemnly not to do any harm to the population. Every family was compelled to give hospitality to some soldiers. Suddenly, one morning, the soldiers fell on their unsuspecting hosts and began a butchery which defies description. Over four thousand men, women, children, and old people were tortured and massacred, two thousand died of hunger and cold; houses, villages and towns were pillaged, and set on fire or destroyed.

The rumor of this crime, known as "Piedmontese Easter," stirred the indignation and horror of the Protestant countries. Oliver Cromwell proclaimed a day of fast on behalf of the Waldensians and collected a large amount of money for their relief. John Milton wrote, on this occasion, his famous sonnet: "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints . . ."

Only thirty years of relative peace elapsed and another tragic event nearly succeeded in sweeping out all remnants of Waldensian people from Italy.

In 1685 the King of France, Louis XIV, revoked the Edict of Nantes and forbade all exercise of the Protestant religion in his States; he also compelled the Duke of Savoy, Victor Amadeus II, to issue a similar decree against the Waldensians.

A French army invaded again the Waldensian Valleys. The last fortress, Pra del Torno, was taken, four thousand people killed, fourteen thousand taken to prison and tortured; in less than one year, five thousand of these died. Two thousand children were forcibly taken from their parents and brought up in the Roman Catholic faith. Only very few were left uncaptured, and wandered aimlessly in the mountains.

The Swiss sent deputies to the Duke beseeching him to permit the prisoners to emigrate. At last he consented and the Waldensians were welcomed in that hospitable country. Some went to Wurttemberg, some to Hesse, the Palatinate and some to Brandeburgh.

But they longed to return to their land. Their pastor, Henry Arnaud, conceived the audacious project to take arms to reconquer the native soil. On the night of the 16th of August, 1689, Arnaud and nine hundred Waldensians gathered on the shore of the lake at Geneva and falling on their knees, they besought God to bring them back to the land of their fathers.

A few boats transported them to the opposite side of the lake. They climbed the mountains of Savoy, fought many a battle, and finally reached their native Valleys.

At Sibaud, above the village of Bobbio, all swore mutual

fidelity till death: "Since the mercy of God has happily brought us back to the heritage of our fathers, to reestablish here the true worship of our holy religion, we have determined to complete the great work that the Almighty God has until now marvellously directed in our favor. We each and all promise our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, to consecrate all our strength to deliver our brothers, the prisoners of the cruel Babylon, and to reconstruct with them the Kingdom of our Lord, and to defend it to death."

To avoid being destroyed by the enemies, they withdrew to a fortified position called Balziglia, and there, a handful numbering about four hundred only, were besieged by twenty-two thousand French and Piedmontese soldiers.

The Waldensians defended themselves with courage, but were compelled to leave the earthworks they had built one after the other until finally, when all hope seemed lost, they were able to escape through a providential thick fog and thus were saved.

Political circumstances turned favorable when the King of France, Louis XIV and the Duke of Savoy broke their friendly relations. In view of the war the Duke of Savoy set prisoners free, released those in the galleys, and recalled his subjects from other lands. Arnaud's auxiliary troops rendered signal services in the war against France, but when things turned well again for the Duke he repaid Arnaud and many others once more with exile. Arnaud was expelled and died in 1721 at Schoenberg in Wurttemberg.

". . . as dying, and behold, we live . . ." (II Cor. VI:9)

We give this rather extended outline of the history of the Waldensians, not only because we feel that the main facts of this epic fight for religious freedom deserve to be more widely known, but also to demonstrate why the Reformation failed to be established in Italy.

The reaction to any spiritual awakening has been in all times

On February 17th Religious Liberty is commemorated by processions to the Mountain tops across which their exiled fathers fled and returned. There they light fires to symbolize their faith.

sturdy and sanguinary. The power of the Roman Church allied with the secular power frustrated all the generous efforts made by thousands of believers through the centuries.

And yet the remnant of the persecuted people from the Waldensian Valleys had won so much admiration and reputation even in our country at the beginning of the 19th century and in the period of the War of Independence (1848-1871) that King Charles Albert could not refuse any longer to grant civil and political rights to the Waldensians. *(Letters Patent, 17th February 1848)*

Full religious liberty was not yet assured, but taking advan-

tage of the gradual spreading of liberal ideas in larger layers of the population and in leading political circles, the Waldensians behaved as if their civil liberation had automatically brought full religious liberty.

An amazing fact, hard to believe, happened in those days. The Waldensian Church, exhausted materially by so many persecutions and losses, but spiritually fortified through the trials, came out of confinement of the Waldensian Valleys, and following the troops of Garibaldi, started once again the evangelization of all the little states and towns and villages which were about to be united to form the new Italian State.

The new congregations which were formed, the new church buildings, together with schools and social institutions of many kinds, all through Italy and even in Sicily, testify to a tremendous and generous effort, accomplished in a relative brief period of time, with great faith, for the general situation of the young Italian State was far from being settled.

Once again, as in earlier centuries, the vitality of the Waldensian Church was revealed in the expansion which flowed outside Italy. There arose flourishing communities in Argentina, Uruguay, Switzerland and the United States of America.

The evangelistic initiative in Italy taken by the Waldensian Church, freed the way to several other Protestant denominations, which, after 1865 started work in Italy.

The evangelistic work had been watched with sympathy by many friends from Protestant countries to whom our Church owes a great debt of gratitude. Yet one cannot help but be sorry to realize that, apart from individuals, whose imagination was caught by the vision of the great opportunities set before us, Evangelical Churches abroad did not see the advantage that would have come to the cause of Protestantism in the world if substantial support had been given to such a work in the very country where, because of the presence of the Vatican power, it would have been of supreme importance to have a strong and powerful and well established Evangelical Church, instead of

several missions struggling constantly with financial difficulties.

The Waldensian Church was compelled to realize, at a certain moment, that it could not extend its work further because it had exceeded its financial possibilities. Many of the new Congregations were and are in depressed areas where the need was and is great, and where the local financial resources are practically non-existent.

Thus several opportunities of new openings were lost at a time when much progress could have been made before the advent of the Fascist regime.

Under the Fascist Regime

The favorable situation in regard to religious liberties created in the period of the Wars of Independence lasted until the end of the first World War. Times of trouble and disorders followed in Italy, with a depressed economy, and no openings abroad for necessary emigration. The Fascist party seized power with violence and established a dictatorship which was bound to be suspicious of the independence of spirit which was a characteristic of the Protestant people. The Roman Church grasped the opportunity to regain the position it had lost during the critical period of the Wars of Independence, especially in regard to schools, matrimonial legislation, and ecclesiastical institutions and property.

Promising its favor to the dictatorial regime, it signed the Lateran Pacts with Mussolini (February 11, 1929) by which a conciliation between Italy and the Vatican was reached on a basis that was extraordinarily favorable to the Church.

The Laws and decrees following the Lateran Pacts consisted of a number of regulations which, put into practice with a renewed spirit of intolerance, permitted the limitation of Protestant activities and of religious liberty in Italy.

The Government efforts in applying the regulations were mainly directed towards stopping any expansion, propaganda, or development of the Protestant Churches, so as to restrict their existence to places where Communities had already been created.

The Pastors were under strict control of the police, most of

the Protestant schools were closed, and youth activities were made very difficult.

The second World War and the hysteria which caught the Fascist party when it became clear that it was going to end ingloriously in a terrific disaster, made the situation of Protestant Churches unbearable.

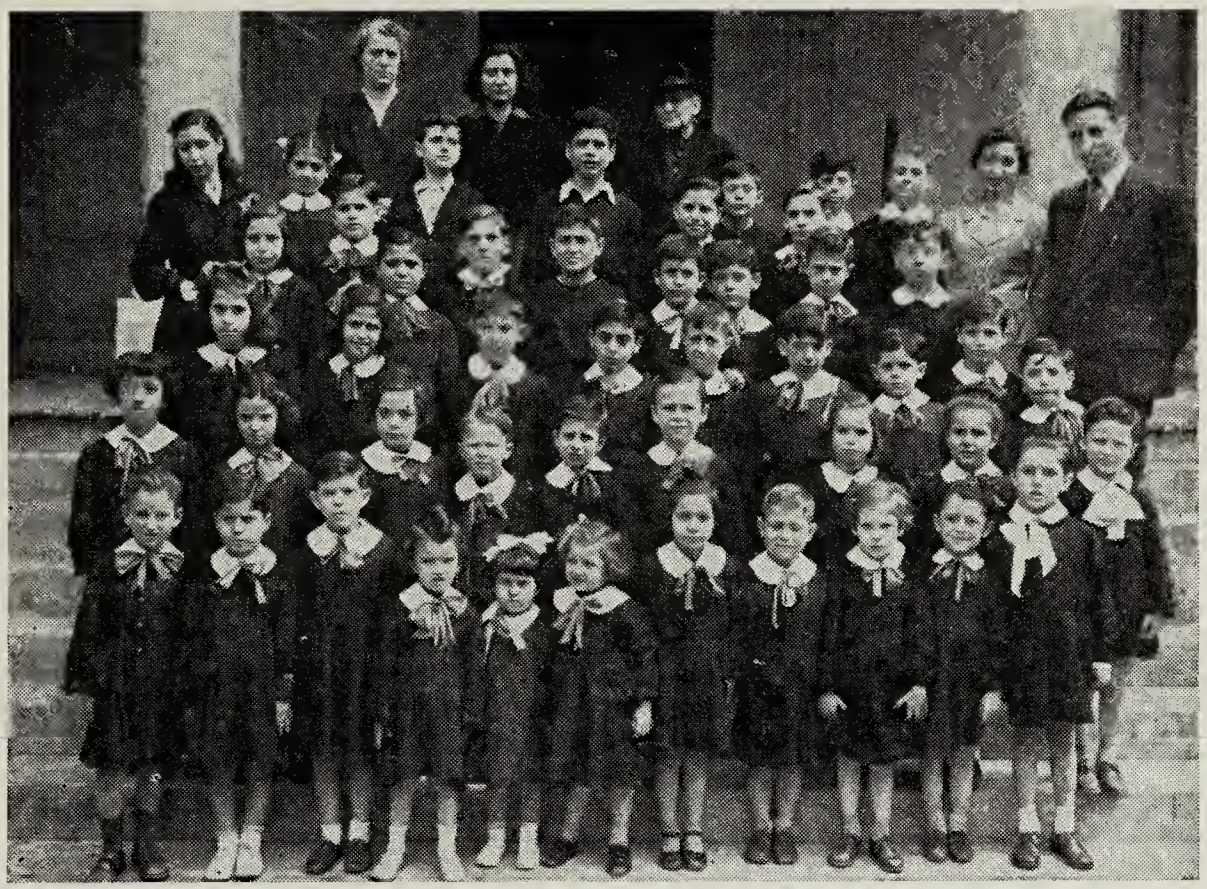
Delusive Hopes

The part played by the Waldensians in the underground movement, especially in northern Italy to hasten the liberation from the Fascist regime should be better known. Once again we had to suffer losses of men and boys killed as hostages, imprisonments, deportation of young men, and all forms of reprisals in the Waldensian Valleys with accompanying pillage and destruction of villages.

Meanwhile, the Waldensians living in the towns and villages of central and southern Italy in addition to their sufferings in common with the other Italian citizens because of the heavy air raids, had the tremendous concern and anxiety for their relatives in the north, whose fate was unknown to them for more than two years.

Nevertheless, with the coming of the Allies, new hopes of freedom kindled our hearts. The presence of many Protestant soldiers filling our Churches, the contacts established with many Chaplains of the Allied Forces, seemed to have somewhat changed the attitude of the Italian population and of the Italian authorities towards Protestantism. People seemed less afraid to enter our churches, to seek contacts with us, to ask questions. Clear signs of independence of thought in many people made the approach on religious ground much easier. While under the control of the Allies, we were granted permission of radio religious services every Sunday, we were free to hold open air meetings, we could open new places of worship in certain areas where in previous times we had met the opposition of the local authorities.

Even when the Allies withdrew from our territory, between



The elementary School in Palermo, Sicily today. Founded in 1870.

the years 1946-1948, before the De Gasperi's Government, we enjoyed a greater degree of religious liberty.

These were years in which evangelistic mass meetings were held in public squares, in cinemas, in theatres, and in public halls without the opposition of the authorities. Our Pastors have even had openings to address the masses of workmen in industrial factories such as the Arsenals of Venice, of Taranto and the RIV factory of Villar Perosa, subsidiary of FIAT.

It was a tremendous chance to preach the Gospel but this extraordinary opportunity was deprived of the fruits we could expect for two main reasons:

Our Church had come out of the war financially exhausted.

It had to face the problem of reconstruction without any support from the State, while terrific inflation was depriving our money of its value. It was impossible in these conditions to accept the call we had received from so many new places where the population seemed to be inclined to accept the message of the Gospel. How could we build new Churches, open new schools so badly needed, how could we send new Pastors, without financial means?

Our Pastors have done their best going from place to place, each one of them looking after several groups, but in a Roman Catholic Country where people are accustomed to beautiful church buildings, a new group which does not have even a hall for its religious and social activities, is confronted with tremendous problems.

Much has been done, as you will see, more than we could ourselves believe possible, but this problem of lack of meeting places for our new groups is becoming very serious, because where we are in a hired hall, it has often happened that increased clerical pressure on the proprietors prevents them from renewing the lease with Protestant people.

The second cause of restraint following World War II was the political uncertainty which ended in a growing power of the clerical party and a consequent restriction of the religous freedom we thought would be ours for ever.

Between the two dangers of falling either into the hands of Communism, or into the hands of the clerical party, with no other alternative, the great majority of the Italian population thought it advisable to support the clerical party. In this not too bright atmosphere the Constituent Assembly started working at the new Italian Constitution of 1948.

The Republican Constitution of 1948

As soon as the war was over, Protestant denominations at work in Italy found it expedient to unite in a Federal Council of Evangelical Churches. This Federal Council with the advice of some very

able evangelical lawyers took certain steps in order to be sure that the Constituent Assembly should give consideration to the following principles:

(a) Full and complete liberty of thought for all and sundry.
(b) Juridical equality for all religious denominations, on the basis of a non-confessional State.
(c) Religious neutrality of the State in its legislative, as well as in its governmental activity.

These principles have been partially included in Articles 2, 3, 7, 8, 17, 18, 19, 20 of the Republican Constitution. The guaranties provided by these Articles are as follows:

Art. 3: The Equality of all citizens before the law regardless of the religion they profess.

Art. 2 and 18: Liberty of association, even to religious ends.

Art. 17: Liberty of assembly, even to religious ends, with only the obligation to inform the Police Authorities of the meetings to be held in public places, such as streets, squares, and public gardens.

Art. 19: Liberty of worship, in public or in private, individually or collectively.

Art. 19: Liberty of religious propaganda.

Art. 20: Prohibition of setting jurisdictional limitations of any kind, or any tax charges on religious institutions or associations.

Art. 7: Makes an explicit reference to the Lateran Pacts as regards the relationship between the State and the Roman Catholic Church acknowledged by the State as being a juridically independent and sovereign order.

Art. 8 in its 3rd paragraph concerns the relationship between the State and non-Catholic denominations, affirming that they must be regulated by means of "agreements" between the two parties.

The Stumbling-Block

As everyone can see there is sufficient ground in the foresaid articles to assure a considerable degree of religious freedom to individuals.

But in reality, when dealing with the interpretation of the

articles of the Constitution, the question has arisen as to what exactly their legal value is when applied in Government practice or examined in the field of doctrine and legislation. A theory emerged by which certain articles were considered merely guides to the future legislator for the preparation of the necessary laws. Other articles were considered ready to be applied.

We maintain that the articles of the Constitution concerning religious freedom of individuals are clear enough and do not need a supplementary law for their application, because they are principles which cannot but be restricted by a supplementary law.

This interpretation is that of many magistrates who in the period of the last five years have acquitted, with very clear pronouncements, several Pastors and laymen who had been restrained by the authorities in the exercise of the rights granted them by the Constitution.

But the Government of De Gasperi was of a different opinion and answering letters of protest regarding individual cases, and to the formal request for application of Constitutional articles in specific cases, wrote to the Federal Council of Churches and to the Waldensian Church Board, in June 1951 "that the validity for application recognized by the Supreme Court to art. 17 of the Constitution . . . could not be taken into consideration when referred to religious meetings, which were under the direction of special rules, which while not excluding religious freedom on the part of the believers, need, however, particular safeguards because of the special nature of these meetings."

Of the same tenor was the letter received in May 1953 by the Waldensian Church Board which had protested the prohibition of religious meetings in private houses: "With reference to the notes of March 2nd and 16th of the Tavola Valdese, we let you know that having ascertained the facts, it has resulted that the religious meetings in the Commune of Ferentino and Anagni, although held in private houses, had the character of

public meetings. In this concern this Ministry has maintained and it maintains that Article 17 of the Constitution cannot be applicable to religious meetings in places opened to the public. . . ."

The constant attitude of the Government has been that the old Fascist and restrictive laws of 1929 apply in matters of religious freedom.

Why have these laws not been abrogated until now to be replaced by new laws in harmony with the Constitution?

The reason is to be found in the failure of the State to put into practice those "agreements" through which the relationship between the State and the non-Roman Catholic denominations should be regulated as provided for in Clause 3 of Article 8 of the Constitution.

As soon as the Constitution came into force, the Federal Council of Churches lost no time in requesting the Government to renew negotiations for these "agreements" and have repeatedly requested a start, but without effect.

The first official answer from the Minister of the Interior was not given until the end of September 1950; and it was an open refusal to take into consideration the line of action for the working out of the "agreements" proposed by the Federal Council of Protestant Churches.

After the Federal Council of Protestant Churches had again illustrated its views on the correct policy to be adopted, with an adequate "declaration" to the Government, the whole question dwindled to a fruitless exchange of correspondence.

The Ministry has always limited the scope and importance of the question by requesting the Federal Council of Churches to present "specific proposals for legislative regulations which . . . the Ministry will be able to examine in order to draw up in a mutual 'agreement' the relative draft of the legislative provision to be submitted to Parliament."

This procedure cannot be followed because in practice it would make ineffectual the participation of the representatives of religious minorities.

Thus the Italian Government has succeeded, since 1948, to avoid even the beginning of the "agreements" which should regulate the whole question related to the juridical position of the minorities.

An Impelling Necessity

The difficulties arising from such a situation, the numerous cases in which the authorities applying the laws of 1929 instead of the Articles of the Constitution, have intervened with orders, intimidations, arrests, trials, have convinced the Waldensian Board of the necessity of an assiduous work of legal assistance. Thus in March 1953 a juridical bureau was organized. It is dependent upon the Waldensian Board, but it gives its assistance to all Protestant denominations at work in Italy.

The responsibility of this most valuable work was given to a highly qualified Waldensian jurist. His task was first of all to make a research of all cases of intolerance, to note the dealings of the authorities, to give assistance for the preparation of the due protest, to instruct the line of defense in case of trials, to collect and study carefully the judgment pronounced by the magistrates; and then to present the cases to public opinion with printed reports, articles in legal magazines and other newspapers and public lectures in legal circles.

Leaving out the many other tasks of this bureau, we should, however, mention the assistance given in the preparation of all official documents presented to the Government and the necessary study of the points to be discussed when the time comes for the long waited for "agreements" between the Government and Protestant representatives.

The work of this bureau has been of extreme value and we pray that we may be provided with the necessary means for its continuation.

We may just add, that at present there are new hopes of a betterment of the situation.

Dean Vinay of the Theological Seminary teaching Christianity to Peasants and Miners at Colleferro.

The cases of some Waldensian ministers which were happily solved, have stirred wide and deep attention of high magistrates, interventions of several Deputies in Parliament, and the new Minister of the Interior has given assurance that he is willing to start the famous "agreements."

Certainly the happy solution of the problem of religious liberty is not yet at hand. The present struggle will take time and strenuous efforts but we must do our utmost and we are doing it with the clear consciousness that the Waldensian Church, once more, is having a leading part in guiding, with the light of the Gospel, our reluctant State towards a real Democracy.

The Amazing Reality

From what we have said, describing the present difficult situation, one may have gathered a rather dim picture of the future of our Church and of the possibilities

of its testimony in the present time, but keeping in mind the difficulties of the situation, and considering the extension and the quality of the work, compared to the numerical strength of our Church, one may have a bright and inspiring picture.

We thank the Lord for it, because, once more *"His strength is made perfect in weakness."* (Romans 12:9)

This is the present picture:

WALDENSIAN CONGREGATIONS IN ITALY AND ABROAD

Italy	Communities	Pastors	Evangelists	Places of Worship	Members
Waldensian Valleys	18	17	2	21	15,290
Northern Italy	22	13	1	22	4,355
Central Italy	15	11	1	14	2,930
Southern Italy	20	5	3	16	1,959
Sicily	18	6	2	16	1,763
	93	52	9	89	26,297
Switzerland					
Lausanne	1	1	.....	1	150
Zurich	1	1	.....	1	200
Basle	1	.....	.....	1	100
	3	2	.....	3	450
U. S. A.					
New York	1	1	.....	1	300
Chicago	1	.....	.....	1	170
Valdese, N. C.	1	.....	.....	1	980
	3	1	.....	3	1,450
Uruguay and Argentina	19	9	1	28	13,234
Mission Field		2			
	117	66	10	123	41,431

We have in addition 14 candidates to the ministry, 18 retired Pastors, several hundred teachers in the schools of the State and in those operated by our Church.

The Swiss Communities of Lausanne, Zurich and Basle are new ones. They came to life due to the continuous stream of Italian emigration towards those towns in the years preceding the war and following it. Their composition is mainly of young people who have married in Switzerland and have families; so we expect that those Communities will become very prosperous in a short time. They are served by Waldensian Pastors and they send their representatives to the Waldensian Synod.

Of the U. S. A. communities only that of New York is ministered by a Waldensian Pastor and sends a representative to our Synod.

In the post-war period the emigration from the Waldensian Valleys to Uruguay and Argentina has greatly increased. In the last two years more than 500 persons went to settle in Uruguay and Argentina. Those Communities are united in an annual Conference which sends its delegates to our Synod.

We send them a certain number of Pastors from Italy to integrate the number of Pastors who are trained at the Facultad Teologica of Buenos Aires, where a Waldensian Professor has the chair of Old Testament. The students trained at the Seminary of Buenos Aires spend one year in Rome at our Theological Seminary as post-graduates. This gives them a chance to become acquainted with our work in Italy.

Moreover, every seven years every Pastor from Uruguay and Argentina spends in turn, one year in Italy. Thus the relations between those Churches and the mother Church are kept very much alive.

Our Educational Institutions

Owing to the restrictive laws of the Fascist regimé most of the elementary schools we had in many towns of Italy were closed. Only three remained in operation: those of Naples, Palermo and Corato. These schools

operate under the supervision of a Committee of the local Churches.

The most important educational activity is carried forth in *Scuola Latina, Pomaretto* and the *Waldensian College, Torre Pellice.*

The Scuola Latina has three classes with 43 students and gives a chance to the young people of the mountain Parishes of the Waldensian Valleys to start classical studies.

The Waldensian College has 8 classes with 132 students and it is the only Protestant school in Italy preparing for the University.

These two schools both have records of 123 years of continuous activity.

There are no special funds for their maintenance and they are entirely supported by the Church which must set apart for this educational work 20,000 dollars a year.

Yet, in spite of this heavy financial burden, we consider this work of extreme importance in the present situation.

It is known that after the Lateran Treaty (1929) and because of it, the clerical pressure in the schools of the State has been continually increasing. In the Waldensian College we have at least a corner in which classical studies are imparted free from that influence. That explains why we have there students from all parts of Italy, coming even from Roman Catholic families who desire a liberal education for their children. These students of the College, whatever they will become in civil life, will keep a friendly attitude towards our Church. We have very encouraging testimony of this loyalty.

In connection with the Scuola Latina and the Waldensian College, there are two beautiful buildings (the "*Convitto Valdese*") which are boarding houses for students. The Convitto of Pomaretto has 26 students and the Convitto of Torre Pellice has 42 students.

Theological Seminary—Roma. The presence of our Theological

Seminary in Rome, besides our two Church buildings and a new Protestant bookstore, is of extreme importance.

The Library of the Seminary is attended by the cultured people of Rome and even by Roman Catholic priests. Weekly public lectures in the big hall of the Seminary give a chance to many learned people to come in contact with our Church. Courses given by outstanding guests such as Professor Cullman and others from European Universities have given our Theological Seminary particular renown.

The Agricultural School. Since the war, to improve the agricultural situation in the Waldensian Valleys, by giving technical assistance to our country folk and teaching modern farming methods to the youth, an agricultural school has been set up in a model farm in Luserna San Giovanni with the cooperation of a Swiss Committee. Connected with the boys' school, there is also a school of domestic economy for girls.

Our Social Institutions

Four Orphanages. An orphanage for girls is in Torre Pellice with 42 orphan girls. Another orphanage for boys with 35 orphan boys is in Pomaretto.

In Florence we have the Ferretti Institute, an orphanage for girls, with 32 girls and the Gould Institute, orphanage for boys, with 30 children.

Three Summer Health Camps for Children. In the Waldensian Valleys in the Parish of Rora, there is a beautiful up-to-date and well equipped settlement with 60 beds.

The second is in Vallecrosia, by the seaside, capacity 60 beds also. Our best orphanage building which was shelled during the war has been restored sufficiently for summer use.

The third one is in Borgio Verezzi, by the seaside also, with 40 beds.

Four Homes for the Aged. Two are in the Waldensian Valleys: Luserna San Giovanni and San Germano Chisone. One in Florence, one in Vittoria (Sicily).

Home for Displaced Persons. The Refugee problem has been also the concern of our Church. Anxious to give a contribution (although very small) to the solution of this tremendous problem, our Church has secured recently a beautiful piece of property in Luserna San Giovanni where 30 people coming from refugee camps are resettled.

Our Medical Institutions

Three Hospitals. Two hospitals are in the Waldensian Valleys: one in Torre Pellice, one in Pomaretto. The largest is in Torino, the capital of Piedmont. They are up-to-date and well equipped. A certain number of our nurses work also in the hospitals of Milano and Genova, which are evangelical hospitals but not operated by the Church.

Home for Incurables. A home for chronically sick people is in Luserna San Giovanni (Waldensian Valleys). Beautifully located, it has 82 beds.

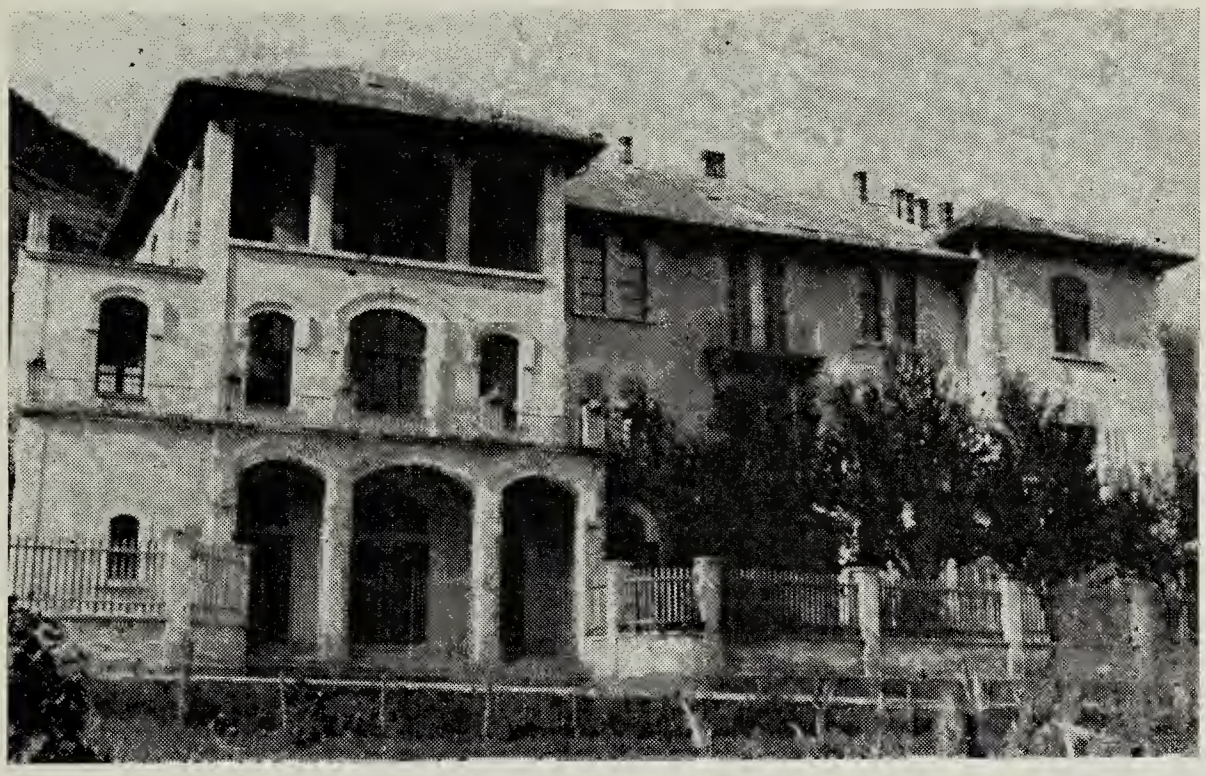
Deaconess Home. A new modern building, dedicated in 1951 in Torre Pellice, is a home of rest for Deaconesses and a training school for nurses who have consecrated their lives to serving in our hospitals and institutions. The actual number of our Deaconesses is 23.

Three Dispensaries. As you have noticed, with the exception of the Home for the Aged in Sicily, nearly all our social activity has been concentrated in the Waldensians Valleys and in central Italy.

There is an urgent need to have a larger social work extended in southern Italy where poverty and misery are appalling.

We have started after the war a medical relief work in Naples. We have there at present three medical dispensaries connected with the Churches, and medical assistance has been given to thousands of poor people without religious discrimination, by nine evangelical doctors who give their services without monetary compensation in a spirit of service and of testimony.

This work is calling urgently for the building of an Evangelical Hospital, the ground for which has been purchased with a generous gift of the Congregational Church in U. S. A.

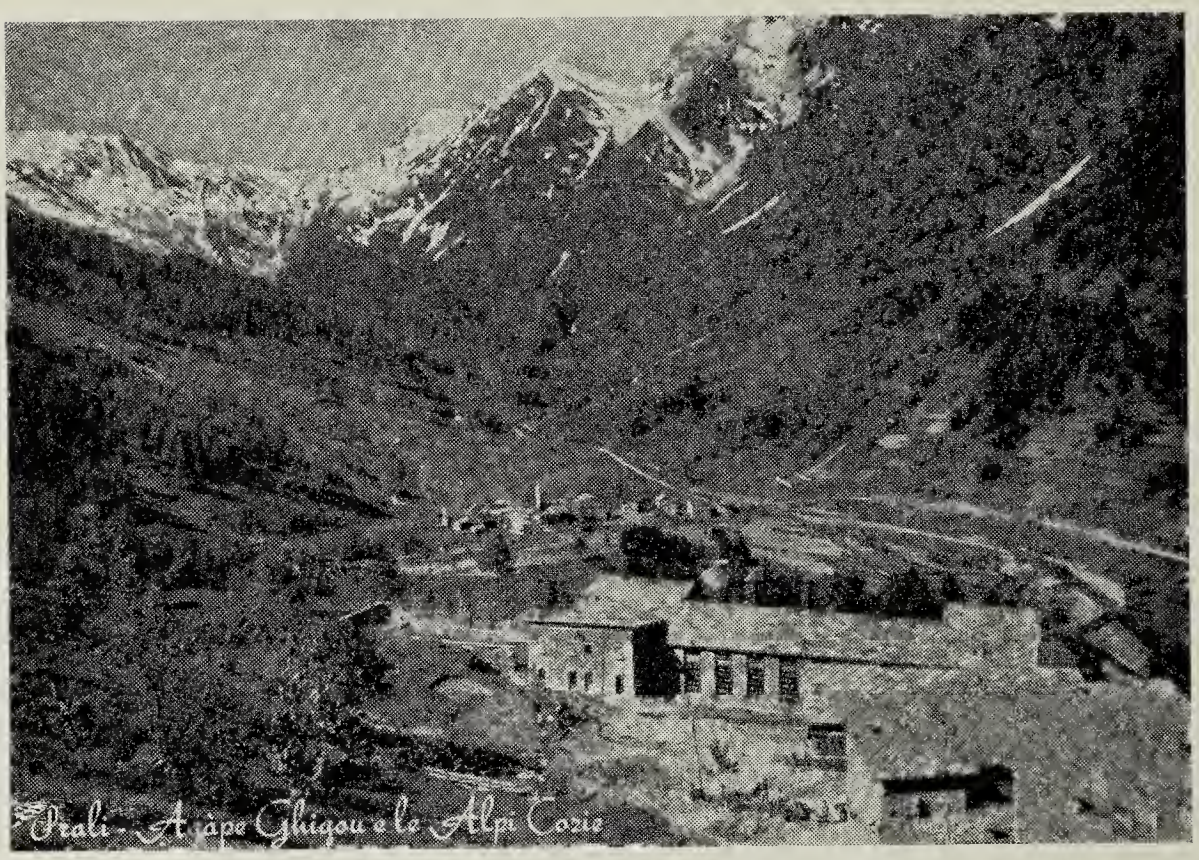


The Convitto and boys' orphanage at Pomaretto.

For years we have had tremendous difficulties with the authorities, prompted by the clerical party, and we were unable to get permission to build the hospital. Recently we got such a permit and next month we hope to start building.

The hospital will be interdenominational, run by a Committee of Pastors and laymen of all denominations at work in Naples. It will be a wonderful testimony of the Gospel for all southern Italy.

Agape I do not need to emphasize the importance of such an ecumenical center of youth activity. Thousands of young people from all countries of the world have met there for work, study and worship linked together by a fraternal love in the name of Christ.



Agape in foreground, Prali Ghigou center, looking toward the French frontier.

Last August Agape was the meeting place of a group of theologians and Pastors and students who came from all parts of Italy, France, Switzerland and Germany to study and discuss the preparatory documents for the Evanston Assembly of 1954.

Radio Services Although many attempts have been made to stop this testimony, we still broadcast services every Sunday morning from Trieste and from Rome on the national radio system. We are granted just a quarter of an hour at a difficult time, but our services are highly appreciated because they are not controversial but simply announcements of the Gospel. A sign of the appreciation is given by the weekly request for more than 4000 copies of the text of the sermon given. That means that many more thousands are listening in.

New buildings of this post-war period:

(1) Agape, the Alpine village—1500 meters above sea level (dedicated August 1951).

(2) The Deaconesses Home (dedicated September 1951).

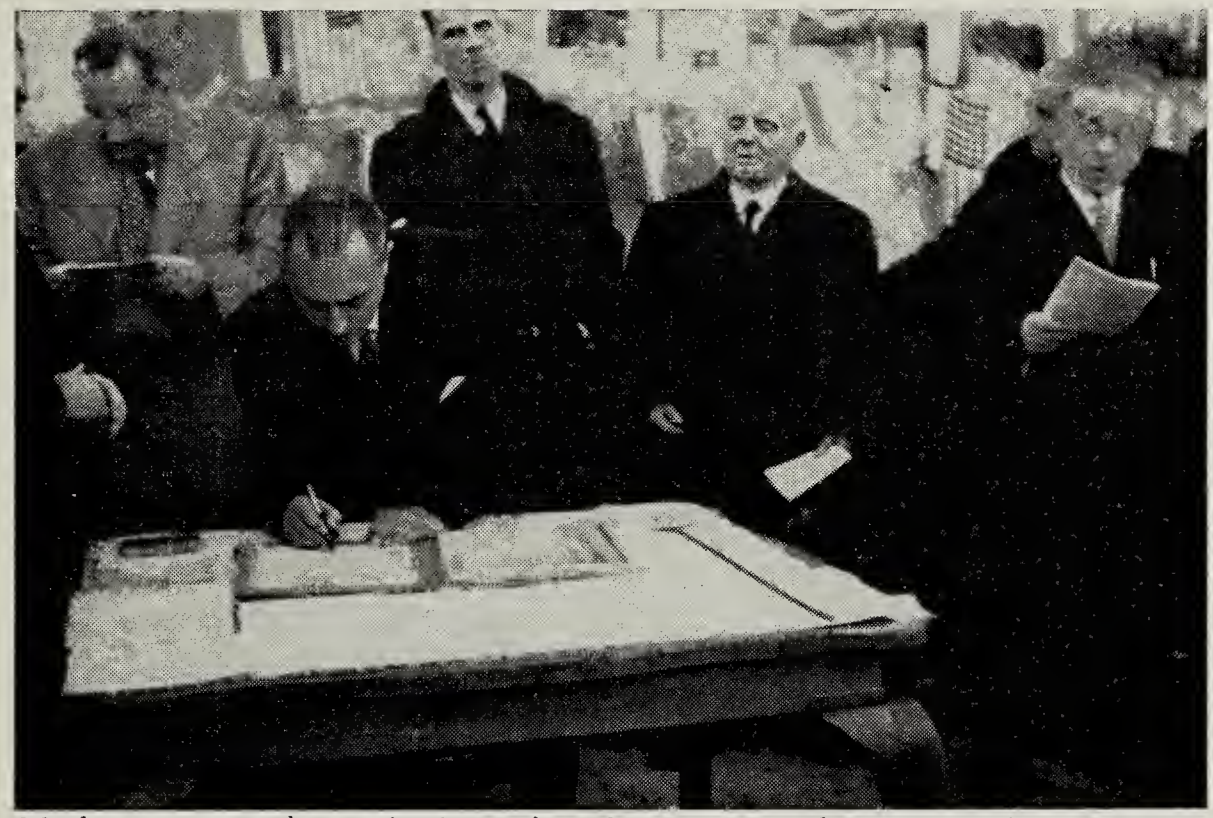
(3) The new Church of Milan (dedicated November 1952).

(4) The new Church at Reggio Calabria (Southern Italy) (dedicated May 1952).

(5) The new Church at Chivasso (near Torino) (dedicated May 1951).

In project:

(1) A Church in Colleferro (the new evangelistic center 40 Km. south of Rome. Around Colleferro there are at present 12 groups which came to life as a result of the evangelistic effort of the Congregation of Colleferro).



Moderator Deodato signing the Cornerstone documents for the new hospital building at Naples. Baptist, Congregational, Methodist and U. S. Naval representatives were present. Nov. 29, 1953.

(2) A Church at Bari (the industrial town of Puglie region, where we have a very faithful and generous Congregation).

(3) A Church at Chioggia (a new evangelistic center near Venice).

(4) The Evangelical Hospital at Naples.

(5) A new wing to the Home for the Aged in Sicily.

It will not be difficult to understand that we cannot carry on this program without the assistance of sister Christian Churches. Our people have given sacrificially to support the work of the Church but they cannot by themselves support all the extended social work of which nevertheless they feel the extreme necessity.

Christ Our Hope

Many a time we have heard the criticism made against our Church, that it should be more aggressive. People who say so generally mean that we should take a stronger polemic attitude against the Roman Church.

That has been in the past the attitude of several denominations and also for a while of our Church.

Our experience has taught us that the right approach is not on the ground of controversy, but in a constructive and positive presentation of the Christ of the Gospel.

First of all, controversy produces an immediate reaction even in those who do not practice Roman Catholicism. They do not like to see the Church in which they have been baptized criticized or attacked in its doctrines even though they no longer believe its dogmas.

In addition to this, those who are in a position of error always find admission difficult, and the immediate consequence of being between two polemic positions is shock, with little chance left for an opening of mind and heart to the Gospel message.

Secondly, we must bear in mind that we have to deal today with people who have lost or have never had any religious convictions. Out of the many millions of the so-called Roman Catholic people in Italy, there are masses of several millions who

have accepted the doctrine of materialism, and have no connection with the Roman Church whatsoever. There are also in great number those who have taken a position of agnosticism.

To all these, a polemic attitude against Roman Catholicism, would but result, as one may easily understand, in a strengthening of their atheistic, materialistic and agnostic views.

We think that what the world needs today is the positive message of the Gospel.

As a Waldensian theologian has written in a recent book of presentation of the Christian faith ("Per Una Fede"—Professor Giovanni Miegge — 1952 — Edizione di Comunita — Milano): "The faith the world needs is not only the expectation of an absent Saviour, it is the faith in a present Lord, the faith in his sovereignty upon this world in which we live. It is the Faith in the Christ who has come, in the Son of God crucified and risen in the year 30 of our era; and because in the Christ who has come it has recognized the One expected in past centuries, the One announced by the prophets, the Son of Man, who was from old appointed to reign according to the plans of God; the primordial Word, by which all things have been made, and which has become flesh full of grace and of truth.

"Within this vision embracing all centuries the rising up of the contemporary ideologies, or the secularized 'visions of the world' or the rushing forth of the irrational powers coming up from below, cannot but be passing episodes. They may celebrate transitory triumphs; in reality they are already doomed.

"The revelation of the Man Jesus Christ foretells their inevitable defeat. They are already overcome since their springing up. We know now that, if history has a meaning, if it is secretly bent towards a goal, it is toward the Man in whom the fullness of humanity is incarnated; not toward the individual drunk with pride and power, nor the wild ruler of warlike mysticism, nor the termite man of mechanical civilization, but toward Jesus Christ; the man in the fullness of his goodness and submission

to God, the man who gives himself to men, the man in communion with man and God. Christ is the meaning of history."

This is the positive message the Waldensian Church offers to the Italian people, the Evangelical alternative to Communism and Clericalism.

ACHILLE DEODATO
Moderator of the Waldensian Church

Rome, November 1953.

Address inquiries and contributions to

THE AMERICAN WALDENSIAN AID SOCIETY
156 FIFTH AVENUE • NEW YORK 10, NEW YORK

Young women in traditional dress sing a service of Commemoration for the heroes of the Resistance.